


A photograph of an older male teacher with glasses, wearing a white shirt and a dark tie, leaning over a desk. He is assisting two young students, a girl and a boy, who are also wearing white shirts. They are all focused on a task on the desk, possibly writing or drawing. The background is slightly blurred, showing a classroom setting.

*Today's
Children*

A photograph of a group of young students, mostly Black, sitting at a table in a classroom. They are all wearing white shirts and dark shorts. Several of the students have their hands raised in the air, indicating they want to participate or answer a question. The classroom has shelves with various items in the background.

*Tomorrow's
Economy*

Courtesy Porter-Leath Children's Center

**Shelby County
Early Childhood Initiatives**

*Providing resources to
parents that help fuel a child's
passion for knowledge*

Shelby County Mayor A C Wharton is making early childhood development a priority in our community. The first five years of a child's life sets the stage for success in school, work and life. Children who have developmentally appropriate early education and who have parents well versed in nurturing, feeding and fostering healthy behaviors have much greater chances for success.

Shelby County is home to 19% of Tennessee's child population, more than the state's other major metro areas combined. Early childhood development is critical to future funding requirements in schools, criminal justice and public health.



Early Development and Education

Of Shelby County's 81,000 children who are pre-kindergarten age, more than half are enrolled in some form of child care outside of their own home each day. Since care and education during these early years determines future success, Mayor Wharton and a group of community leaders are working together to improve early care and education in Shelby County. Research shows that the return on investment in quality early care and education is extremely high. Several studies have validated the wisdom of investing in quality early care, with every \$1 invested yielding \$7-\$19 in increased productivity and lower social costs.



Head Start

Shelby County Government is the federally designated grantee for Head Start, one of the most proven programs for ensuring high quality early care and education that also includes family, health and nutrition support. Although the County receives more than \$21 million annually for this program and serves more than 3,000 Shelby County children, a recent community needs assessment shows that more than 12,000 children qualify to participate. That's why Mayor Wharton set a priority on stabilizing, improving and expanding Head Start to make sure it serves as many children and families as possible, as efficiently and productively as possible.

Head Start Stabilization

- Head Start now run by Shelby County government
- Initiated a multi-year executive search and hired an experienced Head Start administrator who has gotten program operations on track while also pursuing new strategic partnerships

Head Start Quality

- Partnered with local colleges including the University of Memphis to get Head Start teachers the training and degrees they need
- Closer monitoring of the program results to measure value and return on investment

Head Start is one of the most proven programs for ensuring high quality care and education.



Courtesy Porter-Leath Children's Center

Head Start Expansion

- Implementation of pilot home visitation program for Shelby County citizens
- Establishment of a 40-student Head Start classroom at the University of Memphis
- Innovative partnership with Memphis City Schools to reach more families without increased funding by dual-enrolling children in state funded pre-kindergarten and Head Start

- Adults spend more time reading with children
- Children are more interested in reading books
- Parents are more comfortable reading to their children
- Parents become more aware of their children's reading abilities

For more information or to register online, visit www.booksfrombirth.org

Shelby County Books from Birth and the Imagination Library



Shelby County Books from Birth gives every child under age five the gift of a free library collection, thanks to a unique partnership with the Governor's Foundation and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. Tennessee is the first state in the country

to offer this program state-wide, and Shelby County is the largest community ever to sponsor an Imagination Library program. All 68,000 Shelby County children under age five are eligible and encouraged to participate. The program, which costs only \$27 per year per child, uses no local tax dollars, and is funded entirely from private donations that are matched 1:1 by the state of Tennessee.

Benefits

- Children receive an age appropriate book in the mail each month from birth to age five.
- This free program is available to all Shelby County children under the age of five regardless of economic status.
- Children who are different ages receive different books each month.
- Having books in the home is proven to help children prepare for school:

Early Care and Education Plan and Ready Set GROW Accreditation Pilot

Over the past two years The First Years Institute and Memphis Tomorrow, in collaboration with Mayor Wharton, conducted a year-long, broad-based community planning process to address the needs of Shelby County's youngest citizens who receive care and education outside of their homes each day. The ultimate goal of the plan is to implement a strategy that prepares every child in Shelby County to enter school ready to learn. As part of the planning process, over 2,000 parents, early childhood and day care service providers and community leaders served on task forces or participated in focus groups. The plan's five-year objectives include increasing the number of high quality early care and education programs, improving the quality and consistency of early care and education workforce and increasing parental demand for high quality programs.

Mayor Wharton also assisted with the launch of the Ready Set GROW accreditation pilot program with Memphis Tomorrow and the University of Memphis. The program's goal is to increase the number of nationally accredited centers in Shelby County from 12 to 52. All Head Start Centers are participating in the pilot.



Courtesy Porter-Leath Children's Center

Child Health and Well-being

Healthy children are an indicator of a community's overall health, both medical and social. Under Mayor Wharton's support, county government is providing physical exams so mothers can be healthy between and during pregnancies, immunizations so children can be protected against treatable diseases, and well child exams to make sure children are reaching appropriate developmental milestones.

Actions to Boost Child Health

Mayor Wharton's leadership has helped pull together and create visibility for issues like infant mortality and increased immunization rates. Some action taken to reduce infant mortality rates and improve children's health and well-being include:

Healthy Start

- Provides case management and wrap around supportive services for very high-risk mothers through the pregnancy to the child's second birthday
- Mayor Wharton worked to receive the county's second four-year federal grant worth \$2 million
- Of the 1,200 babies enrolled in Healthy Start's first four-year cycle, all but five survived

Campaign for Healthier Babies

- Regional message encouraging healthy behavior during pregnancy
- Public service campaign that promotes information
- Distribution of more than 10,000 informational books a year

Regional Health Council

- Group of Shelby County citizens representing a cross section of people who work to define the community health agenda and bring certain issues to light through media campaigns and additional committees
- Creates fuel and impetus to make things happen

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

- Federally funded program which safeguards the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5
- Targets nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care.

Immunizations

Immunizations are one of the most important pieces of a public health arsenal. They provide a means to reduce, eradicate and eliminate many devastating childhood illnesses and diseases. There is a continuous effort to ensure children are properly immunized.

The growing number of immunizations can make scheduling and timing complicated so county officials use programs like Healthy Start and the WIC program to check on a child's immunization schedule. Shelby County is connecting the dots to make healthier children and early care a priority.

To learn more about Shelby County's Early Childhood Initiatives, please visit www.shelbycountyttn.gov



Courtesy Porter-Leath Children's Center



Courtesy Porter-Leath Children's Center